

January 2024 report for the Thredling Division from Cllr Matthew Hicks

More public money for adult & children's care -difficult decisions are needed to balance the books

As part of financial plans to prioritise those in greatest need, an additional £42.7 million for children's services and £29.9 million for adult care are being proposed in the budget. Along with local authorities up and down the country, the council has been hit hard by inflation and rising demand for services such as children's care, special educational needs and disabilities and home-to-school transport. It means having to make difficult decisions about the services it provides, including:

- £64.7 million of savings in 2024/25 and 2025/26. The two-year savings proposals, which have been published on the council's website, include:
- £11 million of staffing costs through changing the way services are delivered and restructuring across the council.
- £30.6 million of additional savings from an extension of the council's hugely successful Adult Social Care Transformation programme, which has focused on reducing demand for more expensive social care options by boosting people's independence and ability to stay well for longer through innovative methods including cutting edge care technology. This transformation programme has already saved £30.7 million over the last six years
- £0.5 million of savings by stopping core funding to Art and Museum sector organisations. To assist with the transition, £528,000 of COVID recovery money will be made available to Arts and Museum sector organisations for 2024/25 which will fully cover the funding reduction for one year.
- £140,000 of savings by centralising Suffolk Archives to The Hold and closing the branches in West and East Suffolk. In February 2023, the council committed £3.4m to relocate the West Suffolk Archives branch to the proposed Western Way development. Remaining at its current location would have required over £5 million to protect the historic records and meet modern archive standards. West Suffolk Council has since decided not to progress with the Western Way development, ending that opportunity. Centralising the three branches into one brings Suffolk in line with the majority of archive services across the country and is better value for taxpayers' money.
- £15.9 million of reserves will be used to balance the 2024/25 budget.

This is the most challenging budget-setting process the council has faced for many years. But once again, we are putting adult and children's care at the heart of our plans. However, in order to ensure appropriate levels of funding for these key services, and those most in need in Suffolk, we must make difficult decisions about all the other services we deliver, and how we deliver them. This is necessary because the demand on council services for those most in need in Suffolk is at an all-time high. The cost of providing many of those services is significant, but the funding that we need is not keeping up. Across the country, councils are having to make similar tough choices. Our proposed budget next year will be around £752 million, of which £105m alone is down to these cost pressures from inflation and increased demand. We are a well-run council and over the last five years, we have saved £66 million by working smarter and leaner. But we now need to go even further. We have spent months scrutinising all the council's spending. There is competition for every pound across all our services, and I understand that each service means something to someone. Following the recent funding announcement from the Government, Suffolk County Council will not receive enough funding to keep pace with inflation or the level of demand for services. The council has joined national calls for additional funding, and lobbied the Chancellor of the Exchequer direct.

Full details of Suffolk County Council's financial plans for 2024/25 will be presented to its Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 January. The proposals would give the council a budget of around £752 million for 2024/25, made up of funding coming from Government, business rates, charges for services and council tax. The proposed budget would require a 4.99% increase in council tax in next year. This would be made up of a 2.99% increase in general council tax and a 2% increase dedicated to funding adult care.

We understand the financial pressure facing the Government with public services everywhere asking for more money. This is money that simply isn't available at the moment, especially after the vital financial support made available during and following the pandemic. This means it is up to local authorities like us to find savings to balance the books. I would like to thank the record number of people who completed our online budget consultation, and those who took part in our focus groups. Although the majority of people said that they would rather not see council tax being increased next year, I hope they can understand why - for the first time in years - we must ask for the maximum amount possible to help support those most in need. Our commitment to make the best possible use of every pound of public money made available to us is absolute. The budget proposals will be discussed at the council's Scrutiny Committee and then presented at the Cabinet meeting on 30 January. At the Full Council meeting on 15 February, the proposals will be debated, with a vote taking place on the budget for 2024/25 – the first year of the two-year budget proposals.

Beware the five scams warn Trading Standards

While shoppers look to snap up a bargain Suffolk Trading Standards is urging them to take a few simple steps to avoid being ripped off. Fake websites, scam texts and bogus competitions are just some of the tactics fraudsters use. Be wary of offers that look too good to be true and try to stick with reputable websites that you recognise and trust. Be suspicious of requests to make a bank transfer and ensure you research any individual or businesses requesting financial or personal details. These sorts of scams can appear very plausible, and all too often innocent people fall prey to them.

The five scams to look out for over are:

- Scam delivery texts and emails – You may get an email or text message saying your package has been delayed and it asks you to click on a link to track its status. This link could lead you to a phishing site that steals your personal information. Malicious texts are where someone clicks on a link and provides information, they may then get a phone call from someone claiming to be from their bank who offers to help safeguard funds by trying to convince someone to transfer money into a bogus 'safe account'. Forward suspicious text messages to 7726 and send scam emails to report@phishing.gov.uk
- Fake and copy-cat websites - The holiday season brings endless emails offering deals, sales, and bargains. Some lead to look-alike websites that trick people into downloading malware, making non-existent purchases, and sharing private information. Authenticate a website by checking the address is spelt correctly. Ideally, type it in rather than clicking on a link, or go to getsafeonline.org/checkawebsite
- Bogus charities - Only donate to trusted, well-known charities. Before giving, check the charity's name and registration number. You can verify this at the Charity Commission's website at charitycommission.gov.uk
- Gift Card scams - Fraudsters impersonate one of your email contacts to ask you to buy a gift card for them as a favour. They will typically say they need help buying it as a present as they are too ill, too busy or have an issue with their payment card. The scammer then asks you to share the serial numbers of gift cards to steal the value purchased. If you receive an email asking for personal information or any form of financial help, call that friend or family member on a trusted number and let them know their account may have been hacked
- Fake social media contests, giveaways, and bogus sellers - Social media platforms are full of bargains but are also where scammers lie in wait with too-good-to-be-true offers. Fraudsters set up fake pages with offers to catch your eye and encourage you to share. These are designed to "pharm" any personal information that you have publicly available on your profile. Search for the official page to see if an offer or giveaway is legitimate.

Anyone losing money to fraud should contact their bank immediately and report it to Action Fraud on 0300 123 20 40 or at www.actionfraud.police.uk

Foxhall Recycling Centre redevelopment completed ahead of schedule

The new and improved Foxhall Recycling Centre in Ipswich is now fully open to all customers as construction works have been completed ahead of schedule. The site remained open throughout the build, but service was reduced for business and trade customers and there were temporary restrictions on some waste types while space was limited. The new site increases capacity for vehicles on site, improves access from Foxhall Road and reduces queuing on the highway. It also has a new raised-level construction, giving better access to containers for users without the need for stairs. Improvements have also been made to the site's Re-use shop, which sells furniture, sports equipment, kitchen supplies, books, toys and bric-a-brac collected at Suffolk's recycling centres and which would otherwise have been disposed of as waste. The fantastic news that the state-of-the-art facility at Foxhall has opened ahead of schedule is a welcome early Christmas present for us all. I would like to thank the public for their patience while the construction work took place. This is a significant redevelopment of the county's busiest recycling centre which will serve the people of Suffolk for many years to come. The project was originally expected to cost £7.8 million, but the increased cost of materials and high inflation since the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine resulted in the final cost of the refurbishment being £8.3 million. To visit the recycling centre, you will need to book an appointment on suffolk.gov.uk. Appointments are not needed to visit the Re-use Shop, which is open 7 days a week.

Father Gritmas, Gritty Gritty Bang Bang and Spread Sheeran prepared for county's cold snap

Our highways teams have been carefully planning our winter gritting operation for months to ensure we are prepared for whatever the weather throws our way. Over the past week, our 39-strong gritting fleet, named by the Suffolk public, including Father Gritmas, Gritty Gritty Bang Bang and Spread Sheeran went on multiple treatment runs across half of the entire local road network in Suffolk. During the 2022/23 winter season, Suffolk used around 12,989 tonnes of salt to treat a total distance of 177,983 miles – which equates to travelling the circumference of Earth over seven times! Suffolk Highways currently has a stock of around 17,000 tonnes of salt across the county for the season ahead and is well prepared for any further drop in temperatures. Our highway teams are responsible for gritting 36 Priority 1 (P1) routes, which amounts to around 1,259 miles, including all A and B roads, roads to fire stations, hospitals, main bus routes and rail stations. They also have 34 Priority 2 (P2) routes, which amounts to around 843 miles of the network, this includes other bus routes, roads leading to rural villages and access to schools. The P1 routes are completed when road surface temperatures are forecast to drop below 1°C and P2 routes are carried out when the forecast predicts there to be a longer period of cold weather conditions. This entire operation requires extremely careful pre-planning and running throughout, every single decision to grit or not is based upon forecasted road surface temperatures, whilst also considering the impact of other factors, such as wind and heavy rain. But gritting the priority network isn't all that the teams do to prepare our county for wintry weather; Suffolk Highways has also refilled 2,100 grit bins across the county at registered locations, such as the bottom of hills, or on junctions of minor roads. Grit bins are owned by parish and town councils and to ensure that the contents of grit bins are used to make roads safer, our communities are encouraged to monitor how and where the grit is used and if more is required to report it via the reporting tool. Suffolk's residents can also do their part to support us with our gritting efforts by parking considerately and leaving enough room so that our vehicles can grit the road – if we can't fit, we can't grit! Anyone who would like to know when and where we are gritting over the coming months, all gritting activities will be posted to Suffolk Highways' X (Twitter), Facebook and Instagram accounts – so I encourage you to give us a follow and keep abreast of all our team's movements this winter season. More information on gritting can be found on the county council website, and details of which roads are gritted can be found on one.network, by selecting the 3 lines on the search box, then data layers, driver information then winter gritting routes.

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